



SEEKING PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

A KOREA POLICY INSTITUTE READER

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CONTENTS

THE CONTINUING KOREAN WAR

- 02 **LITERATURE OF MEMORY STRUGGLE**
Hyun Ki-young | April 3, 2020
- 12 **EXCAVATING THE HIDDEN TRUTHS OF THE KOREAN WAR**
The Korea Policy Institute Interview with physical anthropologist Park Sun-joo | April 5, 2020
- 21 **THE KOREAN WAR AT 60-NOW 70: NO EXIT**
Bruce Cumings | June 25, 2020
- 24 **THE UNC'S TIME IS UP: DMZ JURISDICTION SHOULD BE TRANSFERRED TO S. KOREA**
Lee Jang-hie | May 24, 2020
- 27 **SEA OF TEARS: THE TRAGEDY OF FAMILIES SPLIT BY THE KOREAN WAR**
Simone Chun | August 22, 2018

THE COSTS OF U.S. SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA

- 30 **MORE US PRESSURE ON NORTH KOREA IS NOT THE PATH TO DENUCLEARIZATION**
Christine Ahn | May 23, 2019
- 35 **THE HUMAN COSTS AND GENDERED IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA, EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
Korea Peace Now! | November 23, 2019
- 37 **"FIRST DO NO HARM": THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON PUBLIC HEALTH IN NORTH KOREA**
Haeyoung Kim interview with Dr. Kee B. Park | January 15, 2020
- 50 **TRUMP'S BROAD-BASED SANCTIONS FAILED IN IRAN AND WILL FAIL IN NORTH KOREA**
Hyun Lee | January 20, 2020

TRUMP'S NORTH KOREA LEGACY: FAILED U.S.-DPRK SUMMITS

- 55 **REAL DENUCLEARIZATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LASTING PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA ARE UP TO US**
Korea Public Service and Transport Workers' Union | June 14, 2018
- 57 **RIP TO THE LIBERAL ORDER: AMERICAN MOURNING AFTER THE US-NORTH KOREA JUNE SUMMIT**
Suzy Kim | August 19, 2018
- 60 **WHY ARE DEMOCRATS TRYING TO TORPEDO THE KOREA PEACE TALKS?**
Tim Shorrock | March 4, 2019
- 66 **TRUMP JUST WALKED AWAY FROM THE BEST NORTH KOREA DEAL HE'LL EVER GET**
Jeffrey Lewis | March 9, 2019
- 69 **THE LIMITS TO NORTH KOREA'S PATIENCE**
Paul Liem | March 4, 2019

TIME FOR A PEOPLE'S POLICY TOWARD KOREA

- 75 **HOW REAL IS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S NEW FLEXIBILITY WITH NORTH KOREA?**
Gregory Elich | July 13, 2019
- 79 **MOST DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE ATTACKING TRUMP'S KOREA POLICY—FROM THE RIGHT**
Tim Shorrock | July 29, 2019
- 84 **DEMOCRATS MUST STOP DISMISSING DIPLOMACY WITH NORTH KOREA**
Minju Bae and Ju-Hyun Park | September 21, 2019
- 87 **NORTH KOREA ISSUE IS NOT DE-NUCLEARIZATION BUT DE-COLONIZATION**
Ajamu Baraka | September 30, 2018



TRUMP'S NORTH KOREA LEGACY: FAILED U.S.-DPRK SUMMITS

**REAL DENUCLEARIZATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LASTING
PEACE ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA ARE UP TO US**

Korea Public Service and Transport Workers' Union | June 14, 2018

On June 12 Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of the Korea and Donald Trump, President of the United States of America held the first ever summit between leaders of the two countries at the Capella Hotel in Singapore. Following the meeting, the two leaders signed a joint statement containing commitments to (1) establishment of a new U.S.-DPRK relationship for peace and prosperity, (2) joint efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, (3) North Korean reaffirmation of the Panmunjom Agreement and efforts to achieve complete denuclearisation, and (4) joint work to recover POW / MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

The very fact that the top leaders of North Korea and the U.S., two countries whose relationship has been laced with hostility and mutual threats for the last seventy years, sat together in one place and shared dialogue is historic and signals a new era in which peace on the Korean Peninsula is possible. We therefore welcome the North Korea-U.S. Summit and joint statement.

Nonetheless, we cannot help but feel some disappointment and anxiety about the fact that the joint statement does not contain an agreement on concrete measures towards the establishment of a peace regime and the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. This is because this failure signals that many unresolved issues remain between the two countries. Up until the Summit the U.S. continued to assert the need for 'Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Destruction' (CVID) of North Korean nuclear weapons, while North Korea demanded concrete security assurances and a staged action-for-action approach. Despite three months of negotiations prior to the Summit it appears the two governments were not able to reach a concrete agreement about how to bring their positions into alignment.

We must be careful not to adopt the overly optimistic attitude of the Blue House, which is already talking about the 'end of the Cold War era' and a 'great victory' for the U.S. and the two Koreas. Nor should we give credence to the extreme pessimism of the militaristic conservatives, who are disparaging the Summit for failing to achieve CVID as if in attempt to send us back to the era of open hostility. Through the Summit today we learned that leaving the fate of the Korean Peninsula up to President Trump's calculations ahead of the mid-term elections, or the goodwill of the governments of the countries in the region is not enough to build a real peace regime. We must understand

the U.S.-North Korea agreement as a starting point and continue to work for advancement towards real peace.

As we made clear during the Candlelight Rally for Peace on June 9, a real plan for denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula has to include withdrawal of the U.S.' policies of nuclear pre-emptive strike and extended deterrence against North Korea. Conclusion of a peace treaty by all relevant sides and a non-aggression pact between the U.S. and North Korea are needed as steps towards creating a Korean peace regime. In addition, a reduction of conventional weapons by all sides and withdrawal of the U.S. troops station in South Korea are needed to remove the material conditions of war and overcome the roots causes of the nuclear conflict. All of these tasks remain before us.

During the press conference that followed the signing of the joint statement, President Trump reference measures North Korea is already taking towards denuclearisation, declared intention to end joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises and referred to the possibility of a declaration to the end of the Korean War. We take this opportunity to stress once again to the Trump and Moon Jae-in administrations that any continued joint military exercises go against the spirit of peace talks and must not go on. In addition, the U.S. and South Korea should respond in kind to North Korea's early steps towards denuclearisation with the removal of the THAAD missile defence system being illegally operated in the Soseongri village.

We must also state our concerns about the 'prosperity' mentioned in the joint statement. As was clear in Trump's comments about the development of North Korea during his press conference, this 'prosperity' is predicated on private investment and the capitalist opening of the North Korean economy. We are concerned that this process, which does not involve workers' participation, has the potential to lead to the expansion of labour rights violations and increase in economic and other forms of inequality. The labour movement must now seriously discuss a plan for peace and unification that furthers the living conditions and rights of all Korean workers and common people.

According to the joint statement, high level talks will be held very soon to discuss the concrete implementation of the commitments made. Given that many unresolved issues remain, it is likely that future negotiations will run up against many difficulties. We will continue to respond proactively to this process based on our desire and vision for a peaceful and equal Korean Peninsula.

2018. 6. 12

Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union

RIP TO THE LIBERAL ORDER: AMERICAN MOURNING AFTER THE US-NORTH KOREA JUNE SUMMIT

Suzy Kim | August 19, 2018

This article originally appeared in *Perspectives Daily*, the American Historical Association's online newsmagazine.

The June 12 summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un was a historic moment—for the first time a sitting US president met with the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, since its founding in 1948. It was remarkable to see the Stars and Stripes standing next to the DPRK flag, and to see the two leaders shake hands in acknowledgement of each other as equals rather than as sworn enemies. Reactions in the United States to this history-in-the-making have ranged from cautious optimism to cynical skepticism. But what these apprehensions indicate is the crumbling of the so-called liberal order under the weight of its own contradictions.

Nicholas Kristof, regular columnist for the *New York Times*, represents the spectrum of reactions well, concluding that Trump was “outfoxed” and “hoodwinked” by Kim. Explaining why the summit made him uncomfortable despite his preference for diplomacy, Kristof wrote, “There was also something frankly weird about an American president savaging Canada’s prime minister one day and then embracing the leader of the most totalitarian country in the world.” In fact, there’s been an odd convergence of reactions that have united hardline Republican hawks like John Bolton with liberal Democrats like Chuck Schumer, who signed a letter warning Trump against any deal that did not include concessions from North Korea regarding its nuclear program. The letter insisted on “anywhere, anytime” inspections of all suspected sites of weapons of mass destruction, a probable nonstarter for a North Korea already wary of American threats and encroachment to its sovereignty.

For liberals siding with Bolton, their position has much to do with Roger Cohen’s argument that Trump is envious of Kim Jong Un and his absolute authority as dictator. Trump’s failings as a leader, they say, are similar to Neville Chamberlain’s—the British prime minister who tried to negotiate with Hitler to thwart World War II. In making this anachronistic comparison, they, like Cohen, believe that Trump has “saluted evil” and gone back on “more than seven decades of American stewardship of the world after the defeat of evil in 1945.”

For many, including Kori Schake of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Trump’s rapprochement with North Korea signals “a turning point in world history: the

end of the liberal order.” The liberal order, according to Schake, began at the conclusion of World War II when “America established a set of global norms that solidified its position atop a rules-based international system . . . promoting democracy, making enduring commitments to countries that share its values, protecting allies, advancing free trade and building institutions and patterns of behavior that legitimize American power by giving less powerful countries a say.” Even while acknowledging that “America doesn’t always get it right,” Schake claims that “the results speak for themselves” since it’s been over 70 years without great-power conflict.

Without any hint of irony or contradiction, she describes the numerous wars that have been waged by “democracies” since World War II as “enlarging the perimeter of security and prosperity, expanding and consolidating the liberal order.” Drawing on aggregate data in the abstract such as growth in the global economy, she neglects to define what “security and prosperity” mean or scrutinize on whom these are bestowed and at whose expense. Schake is oblivious to the harm done in the name of maintaining the liberal order, not only domestically in terms of racist, sexist, and classist exclusionary policies, but also internationally, least of which include the millions of lives lost in Asia, upward of 70 percent civilian deaths during the Korean War, not to mention the Vietnam War (and most recently the Iraq War).

Tellingly, the NBC television show *Saturday Night Live* ran a comedy sketch soon after Trump’s election in which a group of New Yorkers watching the election results respond in markedly contrasting ways. White liberals reacted with utter horror that the election was a “nightmare scenario” and “the most shameful thing America has ever done,” while African Americans were hardly surprised, shaking their heads at the utter lack of historical awareness of institutional racism, structural inequalities, and foreign interventionism. Asia Institute founder and director Emanuel Pastreich argues that US foreign policy has been unequivocally a form of gunboat diplomacy in which US military power is used to benefit multinational corporations. While previously there was at least an attempt to hide the government-corporation nexus, this collusion has now become blatant under Trump’s presidency. These are the foundations upon which the liberal order stands.

What the majority of liberals fail to acknowledge is just how similar Trump’s message of unilateralism and America First (what one White House official recently characterized as the “We’re America, Bitch” doctrine) is to the idea of American exceptionalism that has defined American identity since the end of World War II. The “indifference to democracy and human rights and cultivation of dictators” is *not* a “new world” Trump is creating, as Schake claims; it has undergirded the United States’ superpower status since 1945. While Schake raises alarm bells that “America will be seen as—and may

even become—no different from Russia and China,” it is this very idea of American exceptionalism that has led to the Trump Doctrine.

While leadership does matter for both people in the United States and elsewhere, reactions to the summit have overwhelmingly concentrated on the individual personalities of Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un. This focus on the individual is one of the very tenets of liberalism, and in that sense, Trump—despite criticisms to the contrary—is the very product of the liberal order. By contrast, Kim Jong Un’s first words at the summit—that few in America noticed—focused on the collective past despite the infamous personality cult in North Korea. He said: “It was not an easy path to get here. The past held *us* back, and the mistaken biases and habits shielded *our* eyes and ears, but *we* have overcome all of these to come here” (emphasis mine). Kim Jong Un is having to end a war that was fought by his grandfather; it has taken three generations to get here.

Reactions to the summit in the United States are a kind of mourning at the disintegration of the Pax Americana and the pride of American exceptionalism with it. But this feeling of loss at the end of the liberal order should be put into proper perspective. The last 70 years hold a very different significance for Korea, which was divided into two separate states in 1948 precisely to uphold that liberal order. The Republic of Korea as the bulwark against the Communist North was founded exactly 70 years ago on August 15, 1948, followed by the DPRK the following month. It’s long overdue for Korea to be able to chart its own future. It’s time to bid farewell to the liberal order.

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WHY ARE DEMOCRATS TRYING TO TORPEDO THE KOREA PEACE TALKS?

Tim Shorrock | March 4, 2019

Originally published in *The Nation*

South Koreans are learning the hard truths expressed in the protest music of Phil Ochs from the darkest days of the Cold War. “When it comes to times like Korea, there’s no one more red, white, and blue” than the American liberal, he sang in one of his most biting verses.

Decades later, with the two Koreas on the brink of ending a war that ripped their country apart and triggered the massive US military intervention of 1950, the liberals and Democrats who earned Ochs’s derision may be undermining the best chance for peace on the peninsula in a generation.

As US diplomats prepare for the second summit between President Trump and Kim Jong-un next week in Hanoi, senior Democrats in the House and Senate, joined by a few Republicans, have been sounding alarm bells, warning that South Korean President Moon Jae-in is moving too fast in reconciling with North Korea by seeking a premature lifting of sanctions on the nuclear-armed state.

They are also expressing strong reservations about the US and South Korean negotiations with Kim and warning Trump not to budge on his “maximum pressure” sanctions campaign until Kim has completely dismantled North Korea’s nuclear-weapons and missile program. Kim temporarily halted the program nearly 500 days ago by suspending all testing of his “nuclear force.”

The congressional actions have been fueled by a steady stream of pessimistic and often misleading studies from Washington think tanks, eagerly embraced by US media hostile to the peace process, alleging that Kim is “playing” Trump and that both Moon and Trump may stop short of demanding North Korea’s immediate denuclearization by embracing a more incremental approach.

In recent days, word has been circulating in Washington that Trump’s team in Hanoi, led by State Department special envoy Stephen Biegun, may loosen some US sanctions in return for North Korea’s closing down of its huge nuclear complex at Yongbyon, which South Korea’s *Hankyoreh* newspaper describes as “the center and symbol of North Korea’s nuclear development program.”

Other reports claim that the two countries may set up liaison offices in their respective capitals as the bilateral talks move forward. Those attempts at a compromise, in turn, have set up an internecine battle inside the Trump administration, with hard-liners like John Bolton, who is visiting South Korea this weekend, trying to head off Biegun's diplomacy.

But Trump is sticking to his guns. "I'm in no particular rush" as long as the North's test suspension remains in place, Trump told reporters at the White House on February 19. That same day, President Moon told Trump in a 35-minute phone call that South Korea was ready to use economic incentives, including connecting inter-Korean roads and railroads and other projects, to "reduce the burden" on the United States in forging an agreement with North Korea. "Seoul is ready to reboot inter-Korean exchanges with an early resumption of joint economic projects," a presidential official at the Blue House told reporters.

Top Democrats, however, oppose such moves. Last week, Senator Bob Menendez, the ranking Democrat on the powerful Foreign Relations Committee, joined Republican Ted Cruz in sending a strongly worded letter to Trump that directly attacked President Moon's push for closer economic ties with North Korea. They urged the White House to rein in the US ally by committing "the full weight of the U.S. government to ensuring the integrity of the sanctions regime."

Senator Menendez is also the author of a resolution, now under consideration in the Senate and House, promoting the trilateral military alliance between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, which is highly unpopular among Koreans. It comes as Tokyo and Seoul are locked in a bitter dispute over Japan's use of "comfort women" as sex slaves during World War II and its refusal to provide restitution to thousands of Koreans forced to labor in Japanese mines and factories during that time. The resolution, which was introduced in the House by Democratic Representative Eliot Engel, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, is widely seen in Seoul as a way to pressure President Moon to back off and settle the dispute.

The most dramatic moment of congressional impatience with South Korea came last week, when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi met with a high-level delegation of South Korean lawmakers from both the ruling and opposition parties.

The group, which was led by Representative Moon Hee-sang, the speaker of South Korea's National Assembly, came to Washington to seek support for the inter-Korean peace process started by President Moon during the "Olympic Truce" of January 2018.

According to Korean reporters who were briefed on the meeting, the session was uncomfortable from the start and had to be extended “as the talks grew intense.”

Pelosi, citing her own visit to Pyongyang in 1997, reportedly told her visitors not to trust the North and asserted (apparently with prodding from Representative Na Kyung-won, the floor leader of the right-wing opposition Liberty Korea Party) that North Korea’s “real goal isn’t its own denuclearization but South Korea’s demilitarization.” At one point, Pelosi insisted that last June’s summit in Singapore—the first-ever meeting between a US president and a North Korean leader—was “nothing but show.”

The implication was that the South Koreans, who have had extensive discussions on economic, political, and military issues with their Northern counterparts over the past year, are naive and don’t understand the threat to their own country. Representative Moon, in an interview with Fox 11 in Los Angeles, said he responded to Pelosi that the second summit in Hanoi “is of great importance to the Korean people and it will determine the fate of our country. That’s how important it is.”

The US congressional pressure on South Korea to end its dispute with Japan also contributed to the tension. The issue of Japan’s wartime crimes is particularly sensitive for Representative Moon, who recently suggested that the Japanese emperor apologize to his country for its war crimes against Koreans. Later, he called Japan a “brazen thief” for demanding that he retract his comments.

After hearing Pelosi express her concern about the dispute between South Korea and Japan, Speaker Moon told Korean reporters that the House speaker was essentially lobbying for Shinzo Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party government in Tokyo. “I think Japan told her to have a word with [us] before the meeting, or in other words, scold us,” he said, according to the *Joongang Daily*. Pelosi’s press office did not return phone calls or e-mails seeking comment and clarification.

Still, Pelosi’s comments rattled many Koreans, who are hoping for a successful summit so they can proceed with their plans to eliminate tensions with the North. “Reconciliation and peace between North and South Korea is a gravely historic matter that should be for the Korean people to decide,” Simone Chun, a Korean scholar and activist who has spoken to congressional staffers about the peace process, told *The Nation*. “It cannot be allowed to be reduced to a bargaining chip in the struggle for one-upmanship between Republicans and Democrats.”

Chun was also critical of Representative Na of the Korean opposition party for raising fears during her visit to Washington about a North Korean nuclear attack and opposing

an end-of-war declaration at the upcoming summit. “What Pelosi did was to legitimize the ultra-right-wing views expressed by Na,” she said.

Hwang Joon-bum, the Washington correspondent for *Hankyoreh*, South Korea’s largest progressive daily, wrote an op-ed about the House speaker’s remarks. “Pelosi is just one person who reflects the dominant viewpoint in the American political establishment, the mainstream media and think tanks,” he said. “There was never any chance” that the lawmakers’ tour “would reverse the deep-rooted distrust of North Korea and the antipathy to Trump both inside and outside of the US political establishment.”

The US critics, he added, “aren’t impressed by North Korea’s suspension of nuclear and missile testing since Nov. 2017, its willingness to demolish its Yongbyon nuclear facility and [Kim Jong-un’s] focus on an economic line.”

Daniel Jasper, the public-education-and-advocacy coordinator for Asia of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), said in an interview that he hoped Democrats would start seeing the Trump-Kim talks through Korean eyes.

“We are urging Democratic leadership to see the peace process for what it is—a Korean-led effort to end a 70-year-old war,” Jasper told *The Nation*. “Changing from the view that the current situation is a nuclear standoff to the view that this situation is the result of an un-ended war is essential to understanding what types of reciprocal actions are pragmatic and necessary, as well as why diplomacy is needed in the first place. We remain hopeful that the Democrats will rise above partisanship and political calculations to support the overall goal of peace.” AFSC, which established its first operations in North Korea in 1980, works with four cooperative farms in the country to raise productivity and implement sustainable agricultural practices, Jasper said.

But the Menendez letter showed little appreciation for South Korea’s efforts to help the North improve its economy. Menendez and Cruz listed a series of South Korean actions they consider troublesome, including moves by Korean banks to “pursue investments and operations” in the North and the participation of “multiple business executives” in President Moon’s summit in Pyongyang last September to discuss reopening the Kaesong Industrial Zone just north of the DMZ and tours of Mount Kumgang, a tourist site beloved by South Koreans.

They also complained about President Moon’s recent calls to lift sanctions on the North “as soon as possible” and plans by both Koreas to break ground on a new cross-border rail project “within this year.” They added that North Korea’s “opacity” and its “well-documented efforts of evading sanctions” makes it impossible to ensure “that economic

engagement with the North—regardless of intent to contribute to positive diplomatic progress on denuclearization—would not violate U.N. Security Council resolutions or be used for illicit activities prohibited by U.S. sanctions.”

Meanwhile, in another move that could constrain both South Korea and the United States in their negotiations with the North, Representative Tom Malinowski, a newly elected Democratic congressman from New Jersey, joined Republican Representative Mike Gallagher in introducing a bill that would restrict the US government and the Pentagon from reducing US troops in South Korea from their current level of about 28,000 to 22,000 or less unless the secretary of defense could assure Congress it would not have an “adverse” impact on US security.

The bill, H.R. 889, states that a “withdrawal or significant reduction” of US forces, which could happen eventually if a peace deal is reached, “may risk upsetting the military balance” in the Asia region. It also uses language similar to the Menendez letter concerning the US alliance with Japan, saying that the trilateral ties between the United States, Japan, and South Korea “form the bedrock of regional stability.”

Malinowski, a former director of Human Rights Watch, was the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor during the Obama administration. In 2017, he wrote an article for *Politico* titled “How to Take Down Kim Jong Un” that essentially called for a campaign that would “lead to the end” of the North Korean regime “and its reason to exist as a country.”

The Democratic Party’s current approach was established last June, one week before the Singapore summit, in a letter to Trump from Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer and signed by Senators Menendez, Dick Durbin, Dianne Feinstein, Sherrod Brown, Mark Warner, and Patrick Leahy. It laid out a series of demands, including North Korea’s “dismantlement and removal” of its chemical and biological weapons, which are not currently part of the talks, and urged the White House to “maintain a tough approach to China” throughout the peace process. The Schumer letter also rejected any incremental steps by the US government in its dealings with Kim.

“Any deal that explicitly or implicitly gives North Korea sanctions relief for anything other than the verifiable performance of its obligations to dismantle its nuclear and missile arsenal is a bad deal,” the Democratic senators declared.

Chun, the scholar-activist, said in a recent e-mail to peace activists that the Schumer letter “completely overlooked the recent progress toward peace evinced by the inter-Korean summit and the Panmunjom Declaration and discounted the overwhelming

support for the peace process by Koreans. It also offers no alternative vision for peace on the Korean Peninsula and considers Korean interests only insofar as they serve the narrow political agenda of the Democratic Party.”

After the Schumer letter went out, according to activists who spend time on Capitol Hill, Representative Pelosi and other House Democratic leaders told their caucus “not to speak supportively” of the Singapore summit, which happened to coincide with a week of advocacy on Korea by peace groups. “Many of our folks lobbying on the Hill were stunned at how hostile many Dems were,” one activist told *The Nation*.

But now, with the Trump-Kim negotiations in full swing, a few Democrats are ready to take a new approach. A group of lawmakers from the Congressional Progressive Caucus plan to announce an action next week to express support for the Korea peace process and call on the United States to finally end the Korean War through a peace agreement. That would be most welcome, said Kevin Martin, president of Peace Action and national coordinator of the Korea Peace Network.

“Democrats should support diplomacy, and remember the most important president in this process is Moon Jae-in, not Donald Trump,” Martin said. “Moon’s persistent leadership toward reconciliation and diplomacy with North Korea represents the fervent desire of the Korean and Korean-American people for peace. Members of Congress from both parties should understand that and support it, skepticism about Trump and Kim notwithstanding.”

Tim Shorrock is a Washington, DC-based journalist and the author of Spies for Hire: The Secret World of Intelligence Outsourcing, and a Korea Policy Institute Associate.

TRUMP JUST WALKED AWAY FROM THE BEST NORTH KOREA DEAL HE'LL EVER GET

Jeffrey Lewis | March 9, 2019

Originally published on *NPR*

A bipartisan consensus seems to be forming that President Trump was right to walk away from the deal offered by Kim Jong Un at the two leaders' summit in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The consensus is a strange one, given that the deal itself was exactly the same as what had been reported to be North Korea's position heading into the negotiation, a position that many commentators had praised. North Korea would offer to shut down facilities at its Yongbyon Nuclear Research Center that were involved in making plutonium and highly enriched uranium for nuclear weapons. In exchange, North Korea asked the United States to lift sanctions that had been imposed on its civilian economy since 2016.

Of course, North Korea would retain its nuclear weapons, long-range missiles and many other facilities after such an agreement. And the United States and other countries would also retain many sanctions on North Korea. The agreement on offer was hardly the disarmament that the president had hoped for, but it would have been another step away from the taunts and threats of 2017 and toward some other future. That was the deal the U.S. should have taken.

For the North Koreans, the logic of the offer was obvious. The United Nations had tightened existing sanctions in 2016 in response to a series of tests of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. North Korea has now stopped such tests, closed its nuclear test site, partially dismantled a rocket-engine test stand and offered to dismantle some of the facilities at Yongbyon. Surely an adjustment in sanctions was warranted.

Trump and his team disagreed. One State Department official explained that North Korea must not merely end testing but also give up all the weapons developed on the basis of those tests.

"Testing was part of a process of developing nuclear weapons, and the weapons themselves need to be on the table," the official explained. "It's not the testing of the weapons; it's the actual presence of the nuclear weapons — and, by the way, likewise in the case of missile testing, the ICBMs as well that are central to this discussion."

The U.S. position — that North Korea must unilaterally abandon its nuclear capabilities in exchange for promises of some different future — is a kind of American fantasy about power that is more suited to an action movie than the reality of international negotiations.

Let's be clear: During 2017, North Korea tested a series of new missiles, including two different intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that can reach the United States. One of those missiles, the Hwasong-15, can deliver a nuclear-weapon-size payload all the way to Mar-a-Lago.

North Korea also tested a thermonuclear weapon that exploded with a force 10 times stronger than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By any measure, North Korea's leverage over the course of 2017 increased dramatically as it acquired the ability to grievously harm the United States. We can be angry about this, but our rage is impotent. Attempting to remove Kim from power as we did with Saddam Hussein or Moammar Gadhafi would be sheer madness.

And so, why would the United States expect North Korea to willingly trade away that advantage in its entirety? Why would North Korea, having completed the development of a nuclear deterrent that puts it in a class with countries like China, India, Pakistan and Israel, simply apologize and turn over these capabilities in exchange for a couple of McDonald's and a Trump Tower Pyongyang?

It is obvious, or it should be, that North Korea has a strong hand to play. Why is that so hard to see from inside the Beltway?

I suspect that part of the problem has to do with a kind of embarrassment. Time and again, the United States has walked away from diplomatic agreements with North Korea. In fairness, the North Koreans have been no angels. But the U.S. has seldom stuck around long enough to work through the difficulties and differences.

Each time, North Korea has increased its nuclear capability. In 2002, the United States walked away from the 1994 Agreed Framework that froze North Korea's plutonium production, only to see North Korea conduct its first nuclear test in 2006. The United States tried again but abandoned Six-Party Talks in 2008 over concerns about verification, only to watch North Korea conduct more nuclear tests. And in 2012, the U.S. walked away from another tentative deal over a North Korean rocket launch, only to see Pyongyang spend the past few years testing ever more weapons, including its ICBM and thermonuclear weapon to arm it.

Each time the United States walked, a lot of people in Washington promised that patience and pressure would produce a better deal than the one squandered. And each time they were wrong. Like a gambler racking up debt, the U.S. foreign policy community has consistently taken its chances at the roulette table rather than cutting its losses and admitting the obvious: North Korea has the bomb.

But that's apparently the one thing that remains taboo in Washington. Even now, the United States cannot recognize what seems pretty obvious.

We can't admit failure because it requires not merely changing our policy but admitting that we've been wrong. It's far easier to pretend that a better deal is just around the corner. It isn't.

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THE LIMITS TO NORTH KOREA'S PATIENCE

Paul Liem | March 4, 2019

Rarely, if ever, has the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) succeeded in commandeering the narrative when it comes to past setbacks in its negotiations with the United States. Washington, with China and Russia on occasion weighing in, has typically had the final word. But after the Hanoi Summit last week, that has all changed.

As expected, in Hanoi, the United States called a press conference to make its case to the “global community” that the talks had stalled due to unreasonable demands by the DPRK. But in an unprecedented move for North Korean diplomats, Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho and Vice Foreign Minister Choi Son Hui went directly to the international press to share their views, and likely the views of Chairman Kim Jong Un, on where the talks went awry, challenging the U.S. team to account for its omissions.

Last Thursday, President Trump told the press that Chairman Kim wanted the United States to lift sanctions “in their entirety” in exchange for partial denuclearization:

They were willing to denuke a large portion of the areas that we wanted, but we couldn't give up all of the sanctions for that.... I mean, they wanted sanctions lifted but they weren't willing to do an area that we wanted. They were willing to give us areas but not the ones we wanted.

Shortly after midnight, 3/1/2019, Foreign Minister Ri told the press:

We aren't asking for all the sanctions to be lifted, but only some of them. We're asking for relief from five of the UN Security Council's 11 sanctions resolutions, the ones adopted between 2016 and 2017, and in particular the aspects of those sanctions that interfere with the civilian economy and the people's livelihood.

Ri went on to explain in detail what the D.P.R.K. was offering in exchange for a partial lifting of sanctions, and why:

Our proposal was that, if the US lifts some of the UN sanctions, or in other words those aspects of the sanctions that impede the civilian economy and the people's livelihood, we will completely and permanently dismantle the production facilities of all nuclear materials, including plutonium and uranium, in the Yongbyon complex, through a joint project by technicians from our two countries,

in the presence of American experts.

Even though the security guarantee is more important to us, as we take denuclearization measures, we understood that it could be more difficult for the United States to take measures in the military field. That is why we proposed the removal of partial sanctions, as corresponding measures. Our proposal was that, if the US lifts some of the UN sanctions, or in other words those aspects of the sanctions that impede the civilian economy and the people's livelihood, we will completely and permanently dismantle the production facilities of all nuclear materials, including plutonium and uranium, in the Yongbyon complex, through a joint project by technicians from our two countries, in the presence of American experts.

Ri also stated that the DPRK would commit in writing to a "permanent halt to nuclear testing and long-range rocket testing." Emphasizing North Korea's insistence on a measure-for-measure process, Ri reasoned, "If we go through this level of trust building measures then we'll be able to accelerate the process of denuclearization." The talks foundered, he pointed out, when "the U.S. insisted we should take one more step besides the dismantlement of nuclear facilities in Yongbyon areas." "It became crystal clear that the U.S. was not able to accept our proposal," he stated.

Madame Choi underscored Ri's frustration. UPI reported that "she accused the Trump administration of having moved the goal posts, saying it initially talked about dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear complex and is now taking issue with other sites as well." Madame Choi also stated that Chairman Kim "may have lost the will to negotiate" and that Trump and the United States were "missing an opportunity that comes once in a thousand years" and claimed "our Chairman had a difficult time understanding the U.S. system of measuring," according to CNN.

Ri and Choi's press conference had the effect of holding the Trump administration accountable to a set of facts that President Trump and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, had omitted from their account of the latest U.S.-DPRK summit. A senior U.S. official clarified the administration's account to the media on condition that he remain unnamed, according to Eric Talmadge, AP Bureau Chief in Pyongyang.

Although the official stated that the North Koreans "basically asked for the lifting of all sanctions," he conceded that "the North's demand was only for Washington to back the lifting of United Nations Security Council sanctions imposed since March 2016 and didn't include the other resolutions going back a decade more. What Pyongyang was

seeking, he said, was the lifting of sanctions that impede the civilian economy and the people's livelihood – as Ri had claimed," Talmadge reported.

Lifting the post 2016 sanctions would be worth billions of dollars which the North could use to fund their nuclear and missile programs, the official explained. "So, it was definitely a robust demand. But it wasn't, as Trump claimed, all the sanctions. It also didn't come as a surprise. He said the North had been pushing that demand for weeks in lower-level talks," according to Talmadge.

Up until the last-minute cancellation of the closing ceremony scheduled for last Thursday, during which President Trump and Chairman Kim were expected to sign a joint statement, hopes were running high in South Korea and the Korean diaspora that the two leaders would declare an end to the Korean War and a pathway to denuclearization. Why this did not occur can be understood from the two press conferences and statements by U.S. officials responding to the DPRK's account.

Ri explains that they proposed a partial lifting of sanctions in exchange for shuttering the Yongbyon nuclear facilities because they understood that that security guarantees would be more difficult for the United States to offer. But the closure of Yongbyon was not sufficient for the U.S. team. Statements by Trump, Pompeo, and a senior State Department official indicate that the U.S. team sought a comprehensive disarmament agreement including closure of a "second uranium enrichment" and furthermore, a freeze on production of any "weapons of mass destruction."

In reply to questions from the *New York Times* reporter, David Sanger, President Trump revealed that the United States demanded that a "second uranium enrichment plant" be closed. "But remember, too, even the Yongbyon facility and all of its scope — which is important, for sure — still leaves missiles, still leaves warheads and weapons systems," Pompeo added. A senior state department official put it this way, "the dilemma that we were confronted with is that the North Koreans at this point are unwilling to impose a complete freeze on their weapons of mass destruction programs," the Hankyoreh reported. The official continued, "So to give many, many billions of dollars in sanctions relief would in effect put us in a position of subsidizing the ongoing development of weapons of mass destruction in North Korea," the report continued.

In retrospect, the DPRK team was prepared to forgo a peace declaration in favor of offering the closure of Yongbyon in exchange for a partial, albeit "robust," lifting of sanctions, as a trust-building measure. The U.S. team upped the ante to a freeze on the DPRK's production of "weapons of mass destruction." For a day and a half of talks, this goal was so farfetched that one has to wonder whether the Trump entourage arrived in

Hanoi with any intention to seal a deal or with the goal of simply pushing back on criticism at home that President Trump had been “duped” by Chairman Kim at the first summit, by proving to his detractors that he could “walk.” After all, the North Korean counterpoint to the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” regime of sanctions is that it is now focusing on the mass production of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, asserting that they have no need for further testing. Why would they give them up before sanctions are likewise given up, and before a peace regime is in place, let alone freeze production of weapons programs not yet on the table?

“When we saw the table and John Bolton sitting at the table and Stephen Biegun sitting behind when he had done all this work to do all this preparation, it just seemed for us, ‘Oh my gosh, something fishy is going on here,’” exclaimed Christine Ahn, founder of Women Cross DMZ, *Newsweek* reported. Indeed, a “former South Korean Unification Minister, Jeong Se-hyun, attributed the failure to a last-minute stipulation proposed by Bolton that would mandate North Korea not only report on its nuclear weapons but its chemical and biological stockpiles too,” the report also said.

Ultimately, at the Hanoi Summit, the parties came to an impasse, they walked away from the table on cordial terms with a clearer view of the distance between their positions, they shared their separate accounts of the talks with the international press, and they declared their intentions to return. But momentum towards implementing the pledges of the Singapore Summit last June has been lost, and reconnecting will be challenging.

Early last September, South Korean President Moon Jae-in helped lay the groundwork for the Hanoi Summit when he obtained an agreement with Chairman Kim in Pyongyang, in which “The North expressed its willingness to continue to take additional measures, such as the permanent dismantlement of the nuclear facilities in Yeongbyeon, as the United States takes corresponding measures in accordance with the spirit of the June 12 US-DPRK Joint Statement.” In the triangulated relationship between the two Koreas and the United States, how will President Moon intercede on behalf of U.S. proposals now demanding full disarmament of not just nuclear weapons programs, but also non-nuclear programs, before any sanctions are lifted?

At Stanford University in January, U.S. Special Representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, shared a vision with the audience of a “perfect outcome moment where the last nuclear weapon leaves North Korea, the sanctions are lifted, the flag goes up in the embassy and the (peace) treaty is signed in the same hour.” He won the trust of his counterparts in Pyongyang with his positive outlook. But after being sidelined by his own team in Hanoi, will Biegun continue to have the same influence in Pyongyang?

Koreans in both Koreas and in the diaspora have long awaited peace on the Korean peninsula, but is U.S. society ready for a major culture shift in policy towards the DPRK? Is President Trump capable of preparing the American public to lay aside its reservations and make peace with the DPRK, a U.S. nemesis for the past 70 years?

As for the DPRK, in his 2019 New Year's address, Chairman Kim indicated his desire to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with the United States but cautioned that he would seek other options as needed:

I am ready to meet the US president again anytime, and will make efforts to obtain without fail results which can be welcomed by the international community. But if the United States does not keep the promise it made in the eyes of the world, and out of miscalculation of our people's patience, it attempts to unilaterally enforce something upon us and persists in imposing sanctions and pressure against our Republic, we may be compelled to find a new way for defending the sovereignty of the country and the supreme interests of the state and for achieving peace and stability of the Korean peninsula.

What are the limits to North Korea's "patience," and what might be the "new way" forward for North Korea at this point? These are only a few of the daunting challenges and questions generated by the ambivalent outcome of the Hanoi Summit.

Paul Liem is chair of the Korea Policy Institute Board of Directors.



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